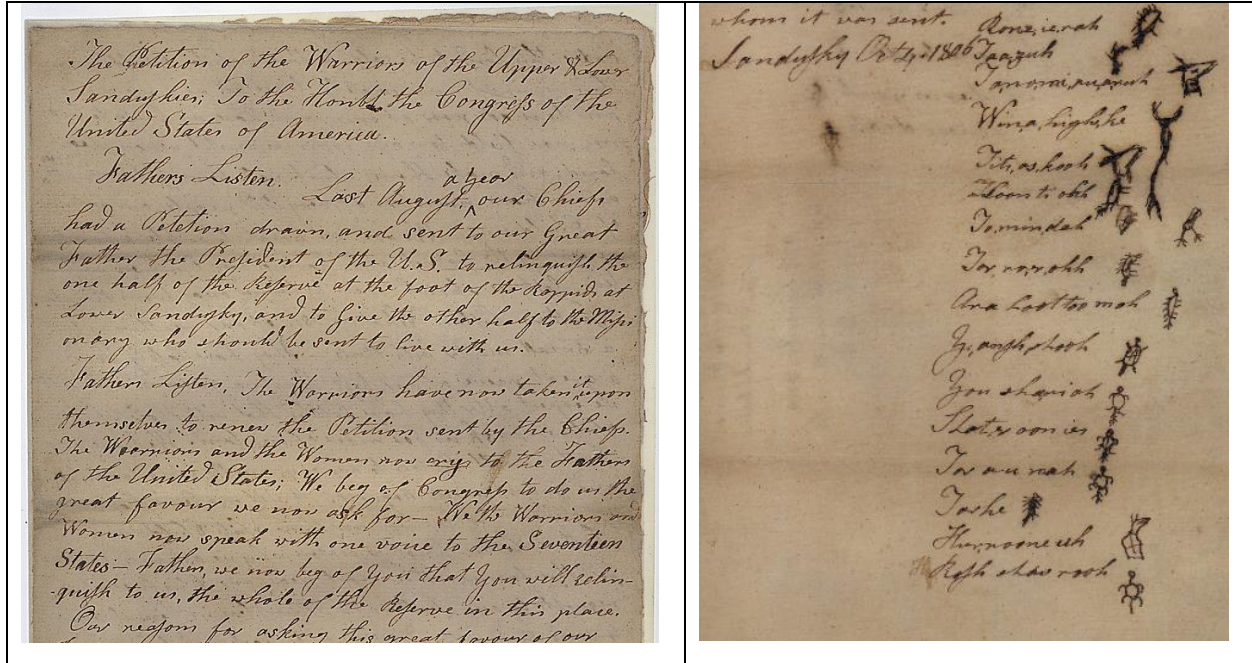


# Petitions to Congress: Grassroots Democracy, 1800–1850

Center for Legislative Archives

## Station 1, Document 1



### Transcript (excerpt):

Fathers Listen,

Last August (a year) our Chiefs had a Petition drawn and sent to our Great Father the President of the U.S. to relinquish the one half of the Reserve at the foot of the Rapids at Lower Sandusky, and to give the other half to the Missionary who should be sent to live with us.

Fathers, Listen. The Warriors have now taken it upon themselves to renew the petition sent by the Chiefs. The Warriors and the Women now cry to the Fathers of the United States. We beg of Congress to do us the great favour we now ask for. We the Warriors and Women now speak with one voice to the Seventeen States—Father, we now beg of you that you will relinquish to us, the whole of the Reserve in this place.

Our reasons for asking this great favour of our Fathers are these—It is the place where we were born, where our ancestors were born; and where they, and many of our relations lie buried—It is our most ardent wish, to live the remainder of our days in this place; and to have our Graves here with our ancestors and Relations.

Another Reason of our asking our Fathers to give us this little piece of land is this. We are desirous to have the Gospel preached to us, and to have our children learn to read; and we want to cultivate our land with the plow; and raise Cattle, and have a Mill to grind our corn. In order to enjoy these privileges, we must build houses and fence fields: But we are afraid to build houses or to make farms and fields—for our Fathers may order this land to be sold to their white Children, and then we must immediately leave all we have done, and be made poor at once; ... which will be very hard for us as we have numbers of very Old people, and...Children. ...



# Petitions to Congress: Grassroots Democracy, 1800–1850

Center for Legislative Archives

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Station 1, Document 1

Document Information:

Petition of the Warriors Situated on the Upper and Lower Sanduskies Begging the Government to Relinquish the Land to Them. December 22, 1806. NAID 306672 (excerpt)

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Description:

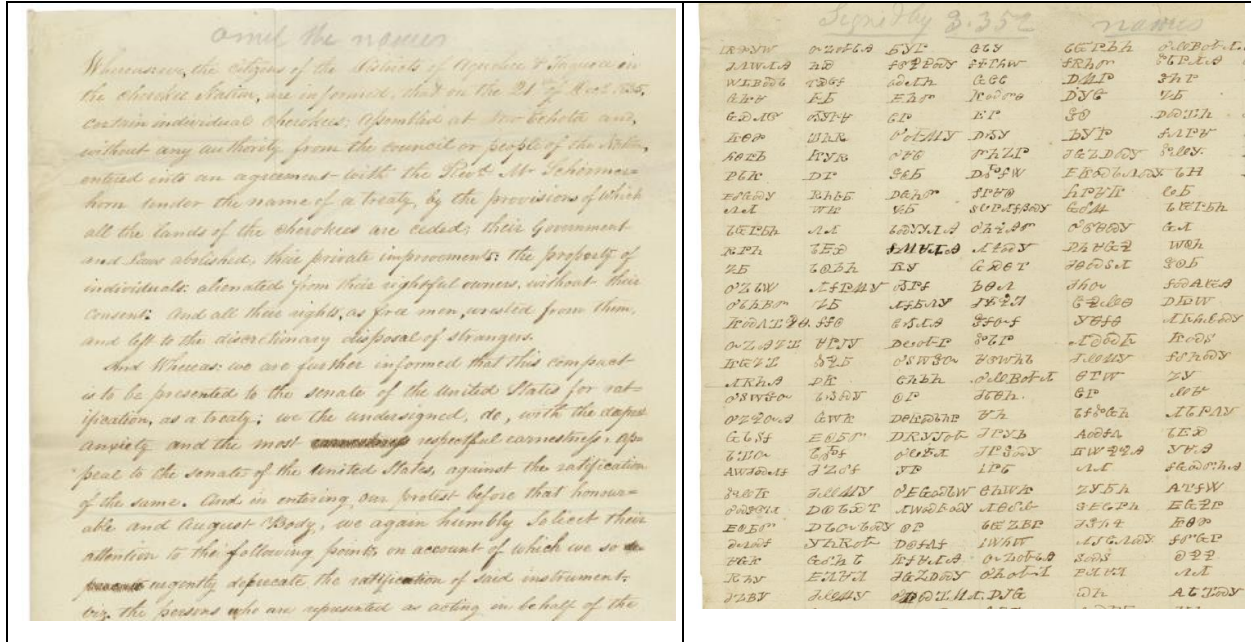
This example features excerpts from pages 1 and 3 of a petition from a Native American tribe located in today's Ohio. The petition was written in 1806, showing that the expansion of White settlement was then pushing Native Americans from this region, and the Native Americans hoped that Congress would help them resist dispossession. Three distinctive features of the petition are that the language of the petition suggests that men and women each had a separate but important status in the tribal society; that the tribe wished to have access to religious and educational resources; and that the individual petitioners signed their names with distinctive symbols. The urgency of the petition's appeal shows the pressure on the tribe. Their ancestral lands were being taken, and they looked with dread to a future cut off from the cultural landmarks of their society. One can see the tribe looking toward the future with hope for their children's education and looking back with reverence for their history. Would Congress help?

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# Petitions to Congress: Grassroots Democracy, 1800–1850

Center for Legislative Archives

Station 1, Document 2



Transcript (excerpt)

Whereas the citizens of the Districts of Aquohee & Taquoe in the Cherokee nation, are informed that on the 21st of Decr. 1835, certain individual Cherokees; assembled at New Echota and, without any authority from the council or people of the Nation entered into an agreement with the Revd. Mr. Schemerhorn under the name of a treaty, by the provisions of which all the land of the Cherokees are ceded; their Government and Laws abolished, their private improvements: the property of individuals: alienated from their rightful owners, without their consent: And all their rights, as free men, wrested from them, and left to the discretionary disposal of strangers.

And Whereas: we are further informed that this compact is to be presented to the senate of the United States for ratification, as a treaty... we again humbly solicit their attention to the following points on account of which we so urgently deprecate the ratification of said instrument. viz, the persons who are represented as acting on behalf of the Cherokees, in this matter, are wholly unauthorized. And the circumstances of a few individuals making a treaty, vitally affecting the liberties, the property and personal rights of a whole people, appears to us so utterly repugnant to reason and justice and every dictate of humanity, that we come to the Senate of the United States with full confidence that under such circumstances the voice of weakness itself will be heard in its cry for Justice...



# Petitions to Congress: Grassroots Democracy, 1800–1850

Center for Legislative Archives

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Station 1, Document 2

Document Information:

Cherokee Petition in Protest of the New Echota Treaty, 1836 NAID 2127291 (excerpt)

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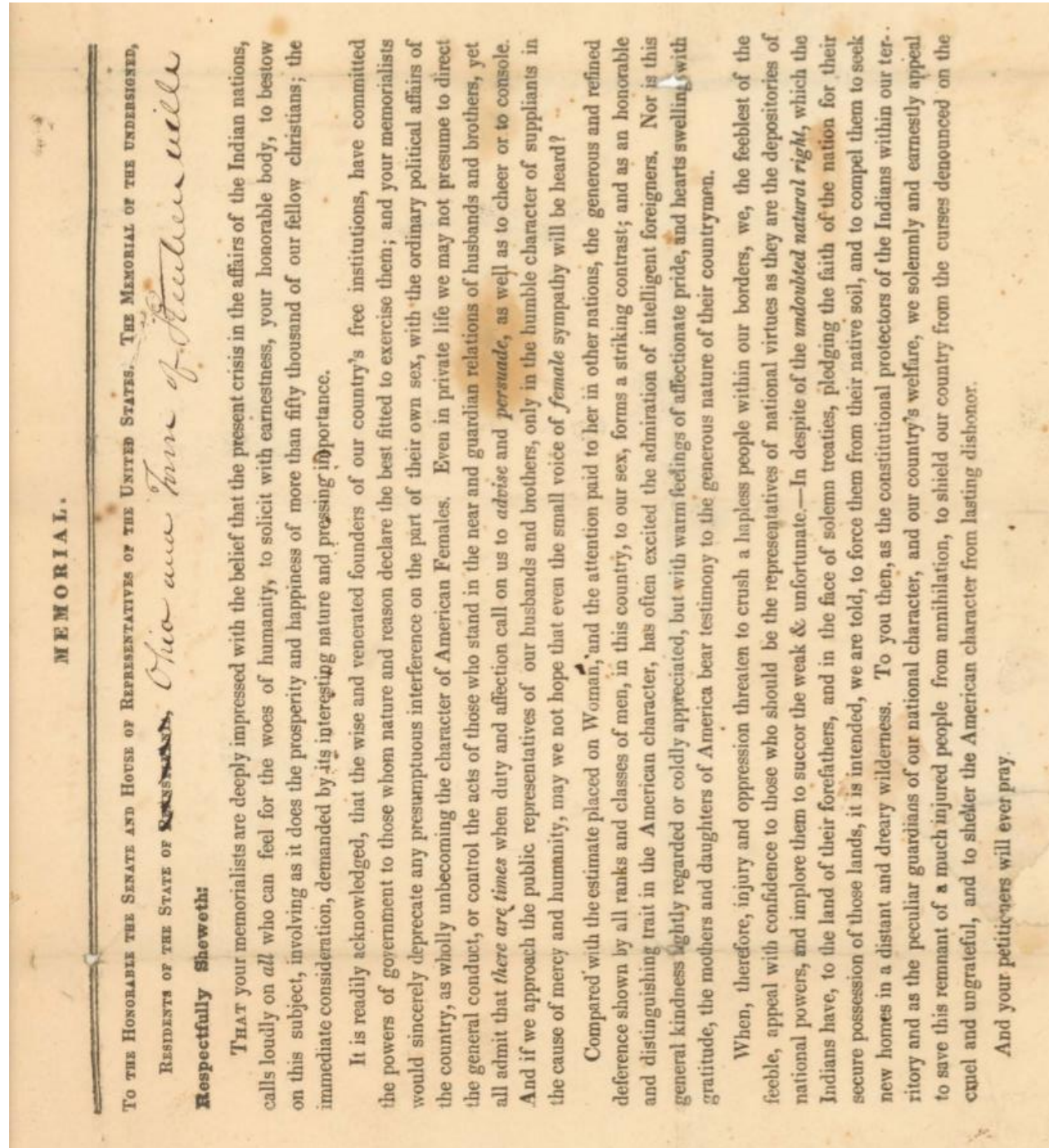
Description:

The Cherokee were a powerful tribe that controlled a vast region in the Southeastern United States. The expansion of White settlement into their land in the decades before and after the War of 1812 eroded their territory, however, and the discovery of gold on their land in Georgia made the situation worse. The Cherokee stood by their treaty rights in the face of attempts by the state of Georgia to appropriate their land. The federal government signaled its abandonment of supporting their treaty rights by enacting the Indian Removal Act of 1830. This petition was written to protest a devious action through which members of the tribe—who had no authority to act for the tribe—signed a treaty giving the tribal lands to a White missionary. Would the Senate of the United States let such an underhanded deed prevail? This petition reflects the Cherokee sense of their tribe as a nation within the United States. Its language reflects the high educational level of many leading members of the tribe, and its signature page shows the names of the petitioners in the Cherokee written language. Although President Andrew Jackson dismissed Native Americans as primitive savages in his 1829 Annual Message to Congress, this petition showed the House and Senate that the tribe was an advanced society with a strong claim for justice. Despite this petition and other efforts to persuade the government to respect their rights, many members of the tribe were forcibly removed by the U.S. military from most tribal lands in 1836, a process remembered as the Trail of Tears.

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Petitions to Congress:  
Grassroots Democracy, 1800–1850  
Center for Legislative Archives

Station 1, Document 3



# Petitions to Congress: Grassroots Democracy, 1800–1850

Center for Legislative Archives

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Station 1. Document 3

Document Information:

Memorial from the Ladies of Steubenville, Ohio, Protesting Indian Removal, February 15, 1830. National Archives Identifier: 306633

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Description:

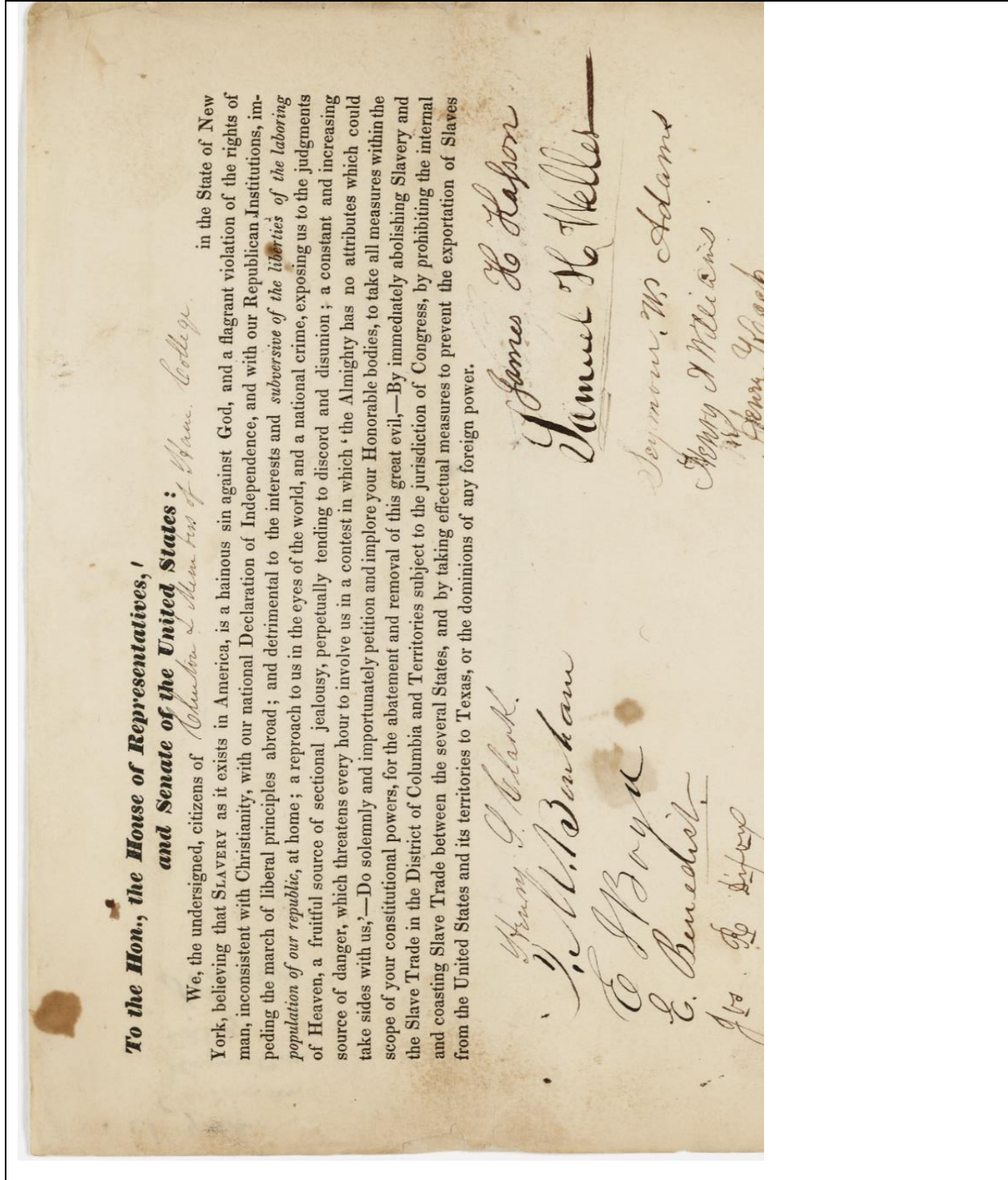
In 1830, women began joining in the emerging grassroots democracy by organizing themselves, as groups of petitioners, within communities and across regions of the country. This document is one of the earliest surviving examples of a petition from women advocating for a political issue. In his 1829 Annual Message to Congress, President Andrew Jackson called for removing Native American tribes from the Southeastern United States, and this petition was sent to Congress just two months after his address. The women identified themselves as residents of Steubenville, Ohio. They appealed to Congress to consider Indian removal as a moral issue. They argued that, as a morally elevated, honorable body, Congress should show compassion for the suffering of the tribes and respond on that basis. Note, from the crossed-out word, that the petition was printed for the use of women living in Pennsylvania, and that it was passed on to this group in an adjacent state. This suggests that the petition was not merely a local expression of opinion, but that it was created as part of a larger movement.

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Petitions to Congress:  
Grassroots Democracy, 1800–1850  
Center for Legislative Archives

Station 2, Document 4



# Petitions to Congress: Grassroots Democracy, 1800–1850

Center for Legislative Archives

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Station 2, Document 4

Document Information:

Petition of the Henry S. Clark and 57 Members of Hamilton College, in the State of New York, against Slavery, September 27, 1837. NAID 23914179

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Description:

This 1837 petition from students at Hamilton College in New York was a bold assertion of sentiment that stirred up controversy. The signers were members of the Hamilton Anti-Slavery Society, a group affiliated with the Boston abolitionist editor William Lloyd Garrison’s American Anti-Slavery Society. The 58 Hamilton students who signed the petition constituted more than 60 percent of the student body. Their strongly worded petition angered New York state legislators who threatened to withhold a large sum of money that they had recently appropriated to support the college. The controversial petition triggered a crackdown on abolitionist activities by students enrolled at the college. The president of the college wrote to the legislature reassuring them that the students had “acted without reflection.” This petition is an important example, because it shows how abolitionism was emerging during the 1830s as a powerful moral cause among Northern religious and educational groups.

Information source:

<https://www.hamilton.edu/news/story/student-abolitionists-altman-desole>

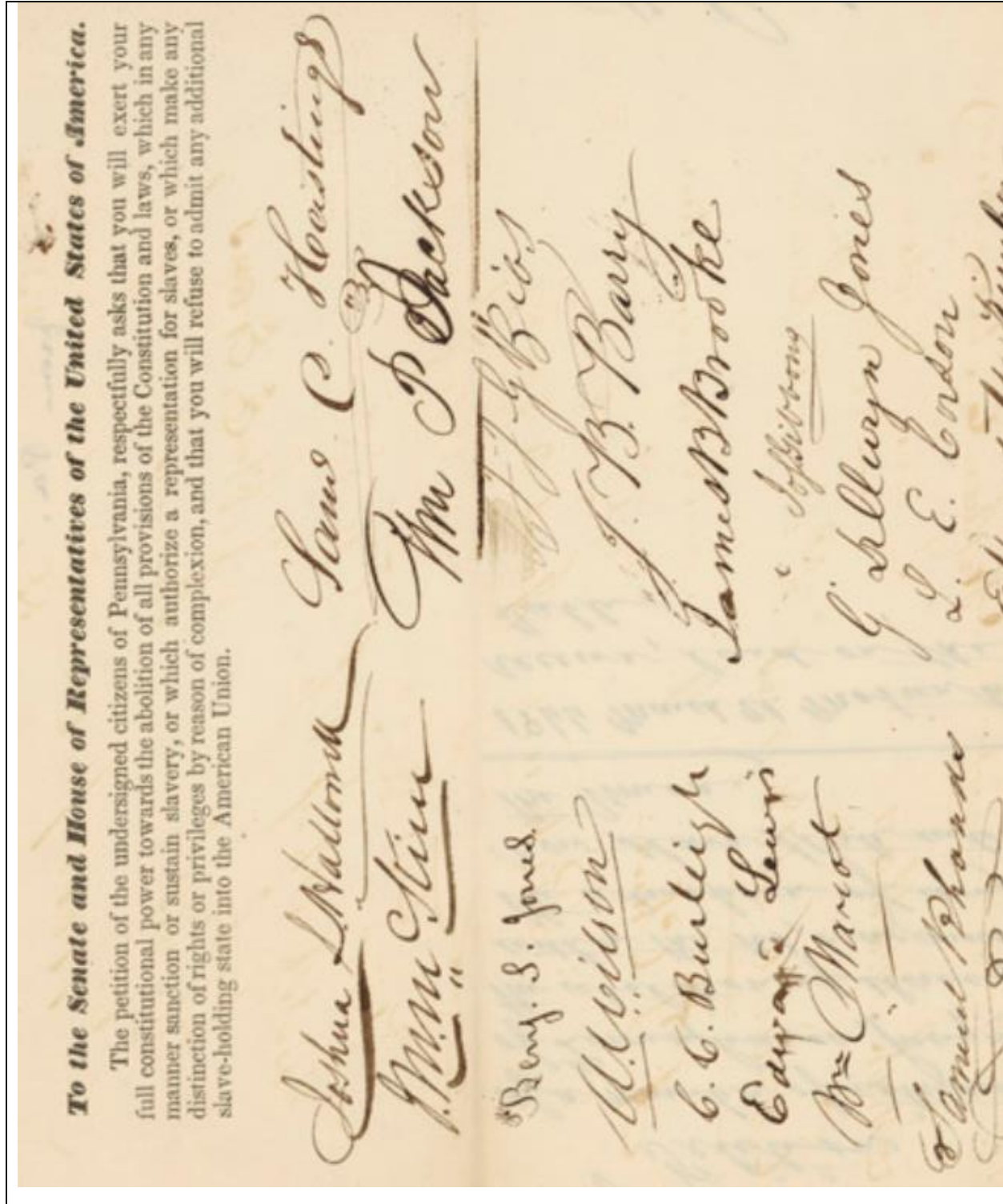
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Petitions to Congress:  
Grassroots Democracy, 1800–1850  
Center for Legislative Archives

Station 2, Document 5



# Petitions to Congress: Grassroots Democracy, 1800–1850

Center for Legislative Archives

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Station 2, Document 5

Document Information:

Petition from Pennsylvanians to Reject Slavery, 1844 NAID 1633886

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Description:

This petition was created in 1844, a Presidential election year in which territorial expansion was a hotly debated issue. The Democrats, led by candidate James K. Polk, advocated annexing the independent republic of Texas, adding a vast slaveholding territory to America's Southwest. The Whigs, led by candidate Henry Clay, tried to avoid taking a definitive position on Texas annexation. Congress received a great number of petitions on both sides of the territorial issue throughout 1844. This Pennsylvania petition was one of many calling on Congress to ban the admission of any slave territory to the United States. Its stipulation that Congress not grant representation to slave holders most likely refers to the possibility that Texas could be admitted directly to the Union as a state, bypassing the territorial stage. The dispute over slavery in the territories would grow as an issue and contribute to the outbreak of the Civil War.

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Petitions to Congress:  
Grassroots Democracy, 1800–1850  
Center for Legislative Archives

Station 2, Document 6

**PETITION**

*For the Establishment and Protection of Freedom in the Territories of the United States.*

TO THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES:

The undersigned citizens and electors of the State of *Illinois*,  
residing in *the city of Chicago*, in the county of *Cook*, respectfully  
pray that Slavery and the Slave-trade may be expressly prohibited by act of Congress in all the Territories of  
the United States.

NAMES.	NAMES.
<i>James G. Banks, Thomas Freeman</i>	<i>John Nease J. Eastman Philip ...</i>

# Petitions to Congress: Grassroots Democracy, 1800–1850

Center for Legislative Archives

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Station 2, Document 6

Document Information:

Petition for the Establishment and Protection of Freedom in the Territories of the United States, April 4, 1850. NAID 26306048

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Description:

This petition was created at a time when Congress was debating the future of the vast Western territory acquired from Mexico under the terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Three months earlier, Senator Henry Clay had proposed a series of resolutions aimed at achieving a compromise between the interests of the slave and free states over slavery in the West. Other contributors to the debate, notably Stephen A. Douglass, a Senator from Illinois, argued that the residents of the territories should decide the issue for themselves—a concept known as Popular Sovereignty. This petition advocates for an opposite policy, known as the Free-Soil position. Free Soil advocates called upon Congress to exercise its authority over lands not yet organized as states by banning slavery from them. The position advanced in this petition would make all the West, beyond Texas free and end slavery in the District of Columbia.

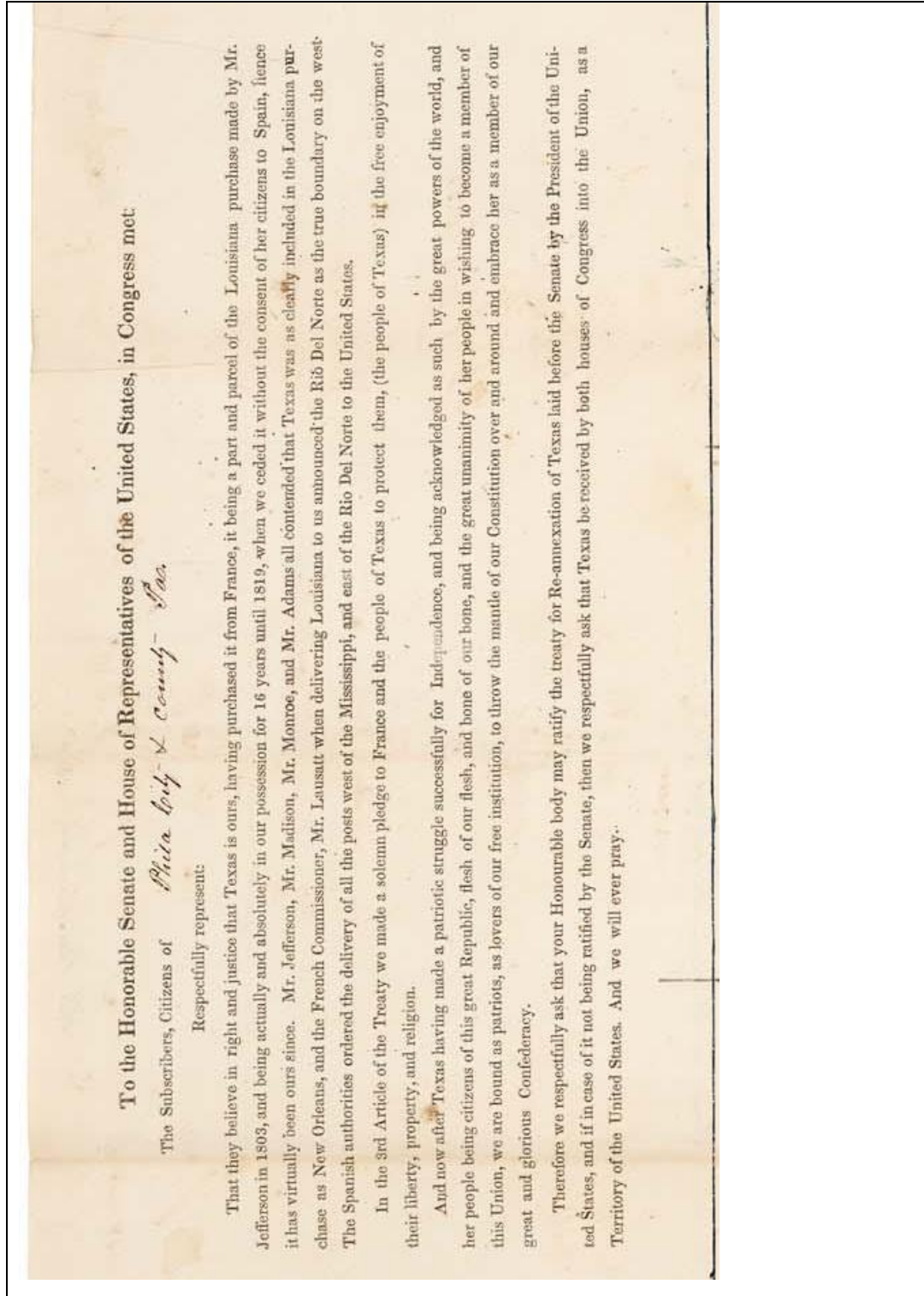
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# Petitions to Congress: Grassroots Democracy, 1800–1850

Center for Legislative Archives

Station 3, Document 7



# Petitions to Congress: Grassroots Democracy, 1800–1850

Center for Legislative Archives

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Station 3, Document 7

Document Information:

Petition from Citizens of Pennsylvania in Favor of the Annexation of Texas, 1844 NAID 595387

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Description:

Manifest Destiny, the belief that expanding across the continent was part of God’s plan for America, was a popular idea in the 1840s. The phrase inspired pioneers to set out for Oregon in covered wagons and led others to call for adding Mexico’s northern provinces, including Texas and California, to the United States. After winning its freedom from Mexico, Texas was an independent republic. The new republic’s cotton-based economy was like those of the Southern states. Not surprisingly, Southerners and expansionists welcomed Texas annexation. Abolitionists and people seeking to ban the expansion of slavery in the West opposed annexation, however. The debate over Texas annexation was national in scale and became the focus of the 1844 Presidential election. This petition, from that election year, sketches the longer history of U.S. claims to Texas to justify annexation. It argues that Texas was included in the Louisiana territory purchased from France in 1803 and wrongly handed over to Mexico in the Adams Onís Treaty of 1819. The petitioners argue that the U.S. should “re-annex” Texas.

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Petitions to Congress:  
Grassroots Democracy, 1800–1850  
Center for Legislative Archives

Station 3, Document 8

To the Senate of the United States

The undersigned citizens of Hardwick & State of Vermont solemnly protest against the annexation of Texas by treaty or in any other mode without the consent of all the states, as unconstitutional — injurious to their rights and interests and dangerous to the peace and prosperity of the Union.

Miss A. Davis  
& Isaac Joseph C. Philbrook  
Isaac Philbrook  
A. Delano  
Obad Cutler  
Alpha Warner  
Alpha Warner jr  
Elias Smith  
E. O. Kingsley  
S. C. Warner  
S. W. Hoyle  
John Kenne  
Nathan Thayer

To E. Fuller  
Amos Jordan  
Arthur L. Smith  
J. Dailey  
John Robinson  
C. S. Mather  
H. J. Thayer

Transcript:

The undersigned citizens of Hardwick & State of Vermont solemnly protest against the annexation of Texas by treaty or in any other mode without the consent of all the states, as unconstitutional — injurious to their rights and interests and dangerous to the peace and prosperity of the Union.

# Petitions to Congress: Grassroots Democracy, 1800–1850

Center for Legislative Archives

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Station 3, Document 8

Document Information:

**Petition from Citizens of Vermont Against Annexation of Texas, April 1844.**

NAID 595416

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Description:

This petition from Vermont was sent to Congress in 1844, when the debate over Texas annexation dominated the Presidential election. The petition raises a novel constitutional argument: that adding Texas to the Union would require the agreement of all the other states. The petitioners argue that adding Texas threatened the peace and prosperity of the Union. While the petition does not explain the reasoning behind its claim, it was most likely based in opposition to adding a slave state. Admitting Texas as a state would tip the balance in the Senate by creating a slave-state majority. A Senate majority would give the slave interests veto power over any legislation and empower them to control decisions about the slave or free status of other areas of Western territory until a new free state was added to rebalance the sectional power. The argument in this petition underscores how powerfully the sectional division was threatening national unity on the eve of the War with Mexico.

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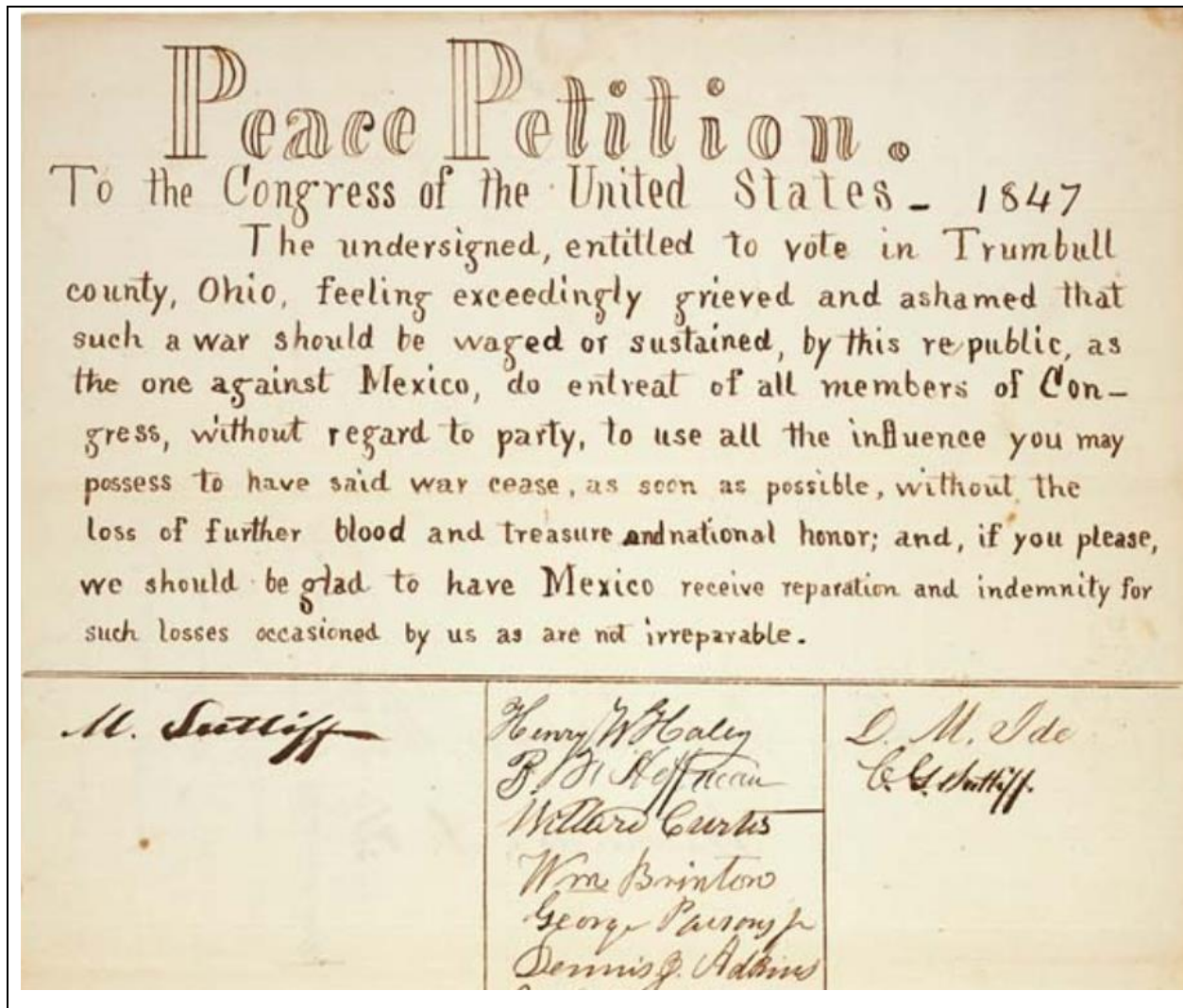




**Petitions to Congress:  
Grassroots Democracy, 1800–1850**  
Center for Legislative Archives

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Station 3, Document 9



Transcript:

The undersigned, entitled to vote in Trumbull County, Ohio, feeling exceedingly grieved and ashamed that such a war should be waged or sustained, by this republic, as the one against Mexico, do entreat of all members of Congress, without regard to party, to use all the influence you may possess to have said war cease, as soon as possible, without the loss of further blood and treasure and national honor; and if you please, we should be glad to have Mexico receive reparation and indemnity for such losses occasioned by us as are not irreparable.

# Petitions to Congress: Grassroots Democracy, 1800–1850

Center for Legislative Archives

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Station 3, Document 9

Document Information:

Peace Petition to Congress from the Inhabitants of Trumbull County, Ohio, 1847 NAID 595303

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Description:

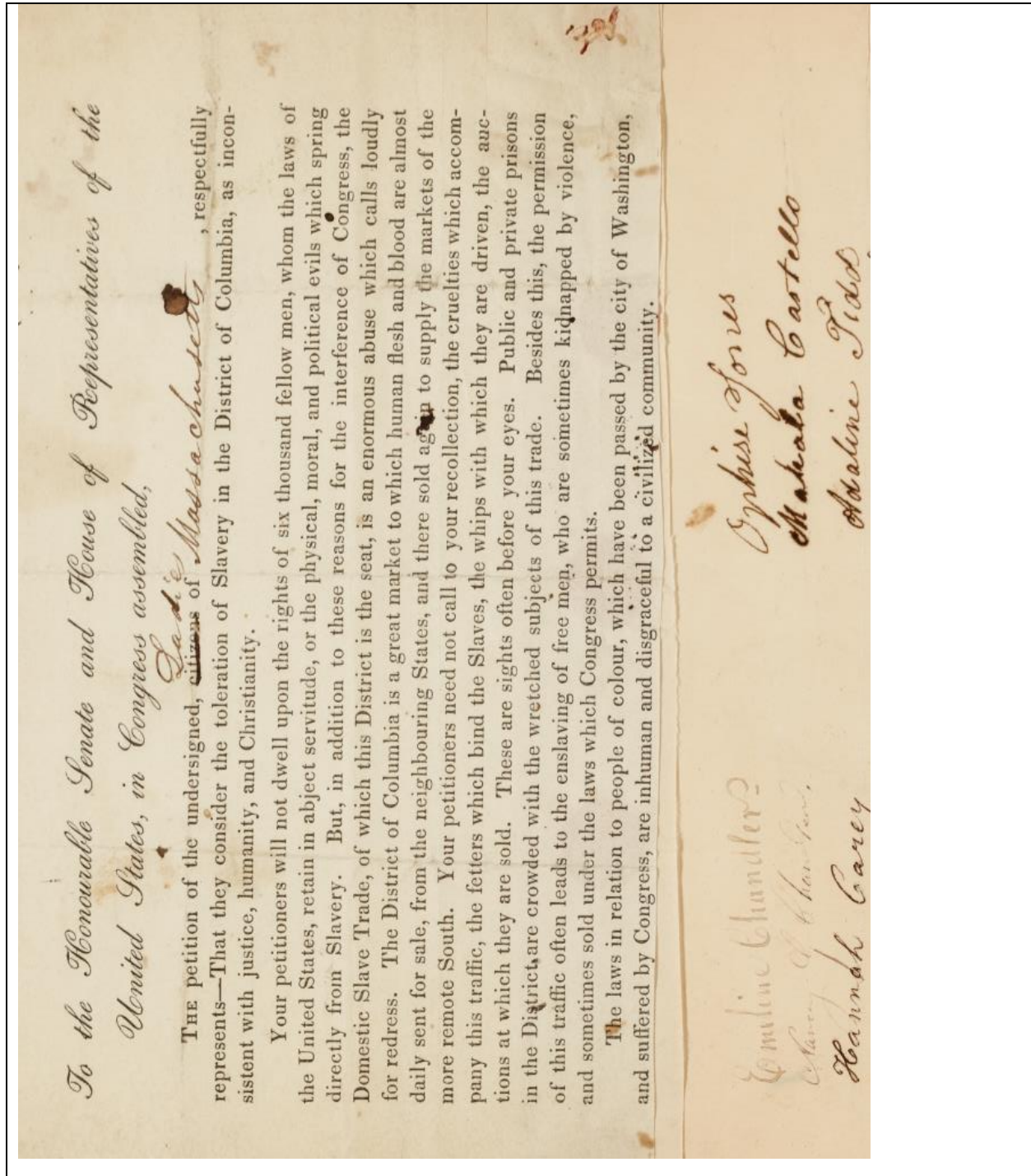
The U.S. war with Mexico (1846–48) was popular in the South but very unpopular in the North. Antiwar protests were expressed in literature (such as Henry David Thoreau’s essay, “Civil Disobedience”), in congressional resolutions (such as Rep. Abraham Lincoln’s “Spot Resolution”), and in many petitions from individuals and groups across the Northern states. The argument in this Ohio petition was based on Congress’s constitutional war power and its authority to make decisions on funding government operations. Although Congress had already declared war, the petition urged the House of Representatives to stop the flow of “treasure” needed to pay for the fighting. A declaration of war is a resolution passed by a majority in both Houses of Congress to commit the nation’s full store of resources to fight. The declaration could be passed as a partisan measure by one party if it had a majority in both chambers. This petition urged Members of Congress to rise above partisan divisions and stop the war as an action in the best interest of the nation.

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Petitions to Congress:  
Grassroots Democracy, 1800–1850  
Center for Legislative Archives

Station 4, Document 10



# Petitions to Congress: Grassroots Democracy, 1800–1850

Center for Legislative Archives

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Station 4, Document 10

Document Information:

Ladies of Massachusetts Petition Regarding Slavery in the District of Columbia, 1835 NAID 12059544

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Description:

Women emerged as organized groups using petitions to lobby legislators in the early 1830s. The first two causes they rallied around were opposing Indian removal and seeking the abolition of slavery. This petition's vivid imagery directs the eyes of Congress to the existence of slavery in the District of Columbia and to the city's markets, where slaves were auctioned to buyers from the cotton-growing states. Slavery was moving south and west in the 1830s, from the Chesapeake region states of Maryland and Virginia that bordered on the District, to Gulf of Mexico and Mississippi Delta regions of Alabama and Mississippi. Slave owners who lived near the District of Columbia cashed in on the economic shift by selling their enslaved labor in the District's markets. The Constitution gave Congress the exclusive power to rule over the District of Columbia and, thus, the power to end slavery and slave sales there by legislation. Similar congressional authority over slavery elsewhere was less clear, and petitions singled out the District of Columbia as a place where congressional abolition could succeed. Petitions to end slavery in Washington were an important aspect of the tide of public opinion that distinguished the 1830s as an era of grassroots politics.

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Petitions to Congress:  
Grassroots Democracy, 1800–1850  
Center for Legislative Archives

Station 4, Document 11

To the Honorable the House of Representatives of the United States.

The undersigned *Colonies of Brooklyn* in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, have learned with astonishment and alarm, that your honorable body did, on the 21st of December last, adopt a resolution in the words following, to wit:

~~Resolved, That all memorials, petitions, and papers, touching the abolition of slavery, or the buying, selling, or transfer of slaves in any State, territory, or district of the United States, shall be laid on the table, without reading, or printing, and that no further action shall be had thereon? being debated printed read~~

*or referred, & that no further action whatever shall be had thereon.*  
Your memorialists consider this resolution a violation of the Constitution of the United States—of the right of the people of the United States to petition—and of the right of their Representatives to freedom of speech as members of your honorable body: They further regard it as an assumption of authority, at once dangerous and destructive to the fundamental principles of republican government, to the rights of minorities, to the sovereignty of the People, and TO THE UNION OF THESE UNITED STATES: They therefore present this their solemn and earnest remonstrance against said resolution, and respectfully ask your honorable body to IMMEDIATELY RESCIND IT.

*Sarah M. Grimké*

*Angelina F. Grimké*



# Petitions to Congress: Grassroots Democracy, 1800–1850

Center for Legislative Archives

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Station 4, Document 11

Document Information:

Petition from Women of Brookline, Massachusetts, Praying that the Gag Rule be Rescinded, 2/14/1838.  
National Archives Identifier: 306638

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Description:

This petition from a group of women in Brookline, Massachusetts (a town adjacent to Boston) bears the names of two sisters who were prominent advocates for women’s rights, Sarah and Angelina Grimke. Angelina Grimke was the wife of Theodore Dwight Weld, a Boston minister who was one of the era’s leaders in the abolitionist cause. The petition shows how women spoke out against the Gag Rule. This rule was first adopted by the House of Representatives in 1835. It ordered that all abolitionist petitions be tabled without being read, and that no action be taken on them. The Brookline petitioners denounced the Gag Rule as a violation of their constitutional right to petition. The text of the petition also reveals that they were participants in a larger movement. The preprinted text of the petition left a blank space for each group of signers to identify their locale, suggesting that copies of the petition’s text were printed in a newspaper or magazine. The printed text of the petition is attached to a sheet of lined paper by wax seals. This suggests that the printed text was cut and pasted onto the sheet bearing the signatures. While there is no evidence of the particular source of the printed text, it was sent to Congress during a decade that saw the emergence of abolitionist publications such as William Lloyd Garrison’s abolitionist newspaper, *The Liberator*, which was printed in nearby Boston and widely circulated.

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**Petitions to Congress:  
Grassroots Democracy, 1800–1850**  
Center for Legislative Archives

Station 4, Document 12

**PETITION.**

**To the Honorable the Senate of the United States and House of Representatives:**

Your petitioners, women of America, whose names are hereunto subscribed, constrained by the love of humanity, address you in behalf of the claims of a million and a half of their sex, who are afforded no legal protection for the heart's dearest ties, or **WOMAN'S** "sacred honor," but with their husbands, sons, and brothers, are the doomed victims of a system that dwarfs the intellect, degrades the morals, and debases the entire being.

Believing that they are solemnly bound to "remember those that are in bonds, as bound with them," and believing that in this **AGE OF LIGHT**, while the great principles of **LIBERTY** are animating the nations, that the government of these United States—this "Model Republic"—should use all its constitutional power to eradicate, within its own bounds, an evil which is being repudiated by the civilized world as its direst curse—they are constrained respectfully and earnestly to pray your honorable body at once to devise such measures as may come legitimately within their province, both to prevent the farther extension of American Slavery, and to withdraw the protection and countenance hitherto afforded by your Government and Flag to the American Slave Trade, and to suppress Slavery effectually in those sections over which Congress has competent jurisdiction. And your petitioners will ever pray.

*Rosetta M. Bowles*

*Mary Anna Perkins*

*Jane C. Coan*

*Julia A. Curtis*

# Petitions to Congress: Grassroots Democracy, 1800–1850

Center for Legislative Archives

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Station 4, Document 12

Document Information:

Anti-Slavery Petition from Women of America, February 27, 1849. NAID 7741397

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Description:

This 1849 petition points out the particularly tragic plight of enslaved women. Created by women, it hints at the parallel between free and enslaved women. The early Victorian era (beginning in the 1830s and named for Queen Victoria of the United Kingdom, who ruled from 1837 to 1901) was a time in which women were urged to confine their interests and ambitions to the home where they should work for the welfare of their husbands and children. Enslaved women, by contrast, had no way to protect what the petitioners called their “sacred honor” or to protect their families from exploitation or the auction block. The language of the petition also invoked the popular idea that America had a special destiny to be better than the other nations of the world. How, the women challenged, could America fulfill its destiny when it was blighted by the moral outrage of slavery? At a time when the attention of Congress was focused on resolving the question of the slave or free status of territory gained from Mexico, the women asked their representatives to resist the expansion of slavery, end the sale of slaves that was tearing families apart, and ban slavery from the District of Columbia and the unorganized territories in the West over which it had jurisdiction.

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